

John Armstrong to Andrew Jackson, June 6, 1824, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

GENERAL JOHN ARMSTRONG TO JACKSON.

Red Hook, N. J. , June 6, 1824.

Sir, In a letter written by you to Mr. Monroe, on the 6th Jany 1817, and recently published by your permission,¹ I find the following passage—"The importance of the station you are about to fill to our country and yourself, the injury in reputation that the Chief Magistrate may sustain from the acts of a weak minister, the various interests that will arise to recommend to office their favorite candidate, and from experience in the late war, the mischief that did arise to our nation and national character (*by the wickedness or weakness of our War minister*) induced me to give you my candid opinions on the importance of the character that should fill this office". Now though it be possible, that I was not the person aimed at in the preceeding extract, inasmuch as there were two or more Secretaries of war during the period you have mentioned, still as it is equally possible, that I was that person (having been one of those Secretaries) I have thought it due to myself, to seek an Explanation, which should have the effect of terminating all doubts on that head; and accordingly, claim alike from your frankness and your justice, 1st a declaration, whether I was, or was not, the person alluded to, in the extract I have given? and 2d a specification (if the preceeding question be answered affirmatively) of those acts of my ministry, which, in your opinion, could only be explained on the ground of wickedness or weakness on my part.

¹ The Jackson-Monroe correspondence was published in the *National Intelligencer*, May 7, 9, 12, 1824. It is also in *Niles' Register*, XXVI. 161–168. The letter here quoted is printed

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ante in vol. II., p. 272, from a draft in Jackson's handwriting found in the Jackson Papers. The latter text and that printed in the newspapers differ (besides some insignificant variations) in one important particular, and in that particular Armstrong's quotation, though one would suppose he derived his text from newspapers, agrees with Jackson's draft and not with the version in the *National Intelligencer* or in Niles. To wit, in the passages where Armstrong uses italics, those newspaper texts both read: "arise to our national character by wickedness or weakness, induced me", etc., without mention of the war minister. Eaton, in his note to the *National Intelligencer* transmitting the letters of Monroe and Jackson, says, "Those of General Jackson are the original letters themselves, which some time since were placed in my possession by the President with authority to use them as I might think proper". The original of Jackson's letter of Jan. 6, 1817, seems not to be now extant, and the copy at the War Department, mentioned in vol. II., p. 272, note, can not now be found.

I need scarcely remark, that the censures of some men are not worth either persuing or refuting, but that when an officer of high rank and well merited popularity, becomes, either directly or indirectly, an accuser of another public functionary, the case is totally altered, and the charges made, ought to be fully and fairly investigated.

In the expectation of hearing promptly from you, I am Sir,

with great respect, your Obed. servant